

VZCZCXRO5578
PP RUEHAG RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHLH RUEHPW RUEHROV
DE RUEHAH #1475 3121127
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 071127Z NOV 08
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1831
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4480
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2292
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2157
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2728
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3046

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 001475

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, PPD, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/07/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SCUL](#) [KPAO](#) [TX](#)
SUBJECT: TURKMEN STATE TV COVERAGE OF ELECTION RECEPTION
NOT BROADCAST

REF: ASHGABAT 1470

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Sylvia Reed Curran
for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Although a TV crew from the state-controlled "Watan" TV channel eagerly attended and filmed parts of post's election reception on November 5 (reftel), coverage of the event was entirely absent from that evening's broadcast, which was instead filled with typical, boring state media stories. In a phone call on November 6, the Watan news director told an Embassy staff member that the TV channel had edited and finalized the story about the election event and passed it "to the ministry" for review. Curiously, the "ministry" never returned the tape to Watan, with no explanation. Embassy staff had never before heard that level of specificity on how news stories are approved prior to broadcast.

¶2. (C) Also noteworthy was the news director's reference to the "ministry." All TV stations are part of the Ministry of Culture and TV/Radio Broadcasting, so this implied it was passed to a different ministry. The Embassy staff member asked &to the ministry? Which ministry? The news director nervously dodged the question and did not specify. In prior cases, media contacts have noted that their stories had been clearly turned down. In some of those cases, they re-edited the material and still managed to have something &less risky broadcast or published.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: We can only speculate about what exactly happened to the election reception coverage, but it does appear to have fallen victim to the government's active censorship process. In this particular case, the excitement and implications of American democracy and elections may have been just too sensitive for the censors to even respond to Watan. This is especially disappointing because President Berdimuhamedov has publicly called for coverage of international news. Watan missed covering a huge international news story, even though it was easy to cover with an Ashgabat perspective. We'll see if Turkmenistan channel, which also covered the event, still carries a story on the reception in the next few days. END COMMENT.
CURRAN